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THE MEANING OF LIFE

W. L. COURTNEY

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THE MEANING OF LIFE

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By W. L. Courtney

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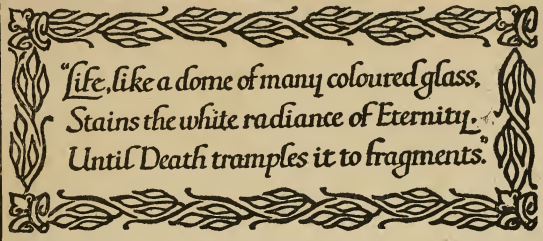

I. THE MEANING OF LIFE

THE meaning of Life! A man who elects to write on such a subject must take his courage in both hands. For it will be his business to attack grave questions on which there is much controversy, and to lay down propositions which are little likely to please everybody. If he discusses problems so serious and fundamental as those which deal with Duty and Happiness and the Existence of Evil: if he raises his eyes to the heavens and asks what are we to think about God; or looking around him asks what is the essential constitution of the universe, he must acquit himself as best he can, with abundance of modesty, some knowledge, and perhaps

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with no little humour. And we cannot all attain to such a combination of gifts.

I take it that there is one indispensable basis on which we must rest the edifice we are trying to build. We must found our theories on Philosophy, because without such philosophical foundations our theories, whether attractive or the reverse, will be floating in the air, baseless and therefore uncertain. The first task we must set about then, is a philosophical discussion, which, so far as possible, must be treated without technical apparatus of abstruse terms, with simplicity, and I hope, with common sense. For myself in this matter, I have a personal reason. When a man is well advanced in the vale of years, he ought to be able to give an account of the faith which is in him, based on and tested by his own experience. Whether it is likely to be useful to others, is a dubious matter. But assuredly it will be useful to himself.

II. WHAT PHILOSOPHY MEANS

I WONDER what most people think is the value of Philosophy. It seems to be generally supposed that only mediæval thinkers, or at all events those who are mediævally minded,

occupy themselves with metaphysics and that the triumph of modern science and of that system of Positivism founded on it by Comte, has finally banished all word-spinning fallacies and fantastic dreams about essences and inner verities and the "quiddities" of things into an unfathomable limbo of neglect and derision.

Of course, it depends on what we mean by Philosophy. If Philosophy is a kind of rival science, then it is clear that the success of the one patronised by modern students—that is, empirical science—must mean the defeat and ignominy of all other pretenders to the throne. But Philosophy is not a science at all in the technical sense and it could only have signified anything of the sort at a time when the philosopher thought it his business to explain the constitution of matter and the origin of the world. What is the philosopher? Plato tells us that he is "the spectator of all Time and all Existence," but then Plato was a little inclined to exaggerate the claims of his own idealistic creed. Let us try to arrive at a more modest estimate.

I suppose that apart from all the various branches of Science, which grow out in all

directions,

directions, there might well be a parent science or discipline, just as there is a parent tree. In nature the trunk supplies the branches with the sap of life, which in the last resort comes out of the fertilising wealth of the Earth. In what sense can Philosophy then supply something fructifying and vital to the separate sciences? It certainly cannot give them the material on which they work, because each science possesses its own subject matter with which it deals by its appropriate methods of analysis and inductive research. But though it cannot add to their store of data (if it did, it would be a rival science) Philosophy can yet supply principles, ultimate notions, administrative and governing ideas. Whether scientific people are inclined to accept these principles at the hands of Philosophy, is quite a different matter. So far as I am acquainted with them, they spurn and reject the offer; they assert that each science must work in its own way, and that perhaps the most important instrument of all is a properly organised scientific method which no Philosophy could give or has given them.

III. WANTED—A WORLD THEORY

WELL then, we must attack the subject in another way. As human beings we want to become possessed of the Art of Life. In other words, we desire to have a working theory which will help us in making the best of our three-score years and ten. We are conscious of a sensitive and emotional organisation, and therefore we must know how to regulate our feelings, our pleasures, our spiritual energies, our faiths and ideals, in order to make the best of them—to force them to contribute to the adequate satisfaction of our nature. But besides this—which might conceivably be formulated into a mechanical system of rules and ordinances—we have an intellectual organisation which imperatively bids us to try and understand the why and the wherefore. We look before and after: we would fain carry out the struggle of existence, as the Greek warriors desired to carry out their struggle against the Trojans, not shrouded in mists and clouds, but in the clear light of day. We crave to *know*. But how are we to compass this difficult matter? Who will show us any good?

What

What is it precisely we want? We want a *world-theory*. And this is what none of the sciences can give us. They may perhaps assure us that they can; and when we are asking how best to save our souls, they may tell us of the Conservation of Energy and the Survival of the Fittest, offering us instead of the bread we need the hard stones—*rudis indigestaque moles*—of Matter and Force and Natural Uniformity. Also they will assure us that they have a world-theory, which goes by the names of Materialism, or Positivism or Naturalism. Strictly interpreted, Materialism means that out of matter comes all life, matter containing, as Tyndall said, "the promise and potency of all existence." All concepts, thoughts, sensations; all spiritual states and moods of high emotion; all ethical and religious ideas are the result of matter in motion, excitations set up in the cortical area of the brain in response to external stimuli. But do they mean that there is a *causal relation* between material atoms in motion and our conscious states? That causal relation can never be proved. Possibly you might prove *equivalence* between the two, so that from one

aspect you can talk of mental processes, while from another aspect you might refer to moving molecules. But that theory does not favour the materialist programme, for it admits that all that we mean by consciousness is *sui generis* and possesses an independent vitality of its own. The fact is that as soon as the man of science deserts his own peculiar province—the phenomenal view of things, the relations of phenomena to one another—and tries to explain reality as exhibited in matter and energy, he begins, whether he is aware of it or not, to talk metaphysics and to put on the long robe of the philosopher. And he carries the robe very awkwardly!

IV. INSISTENT QUESTIONS

IT would seem therefore that we have to go to Philosophy if we want a World-theory. Just because Philosophy is not concerned with concrete details or even with abstract conceptions as to the behaviour of matter and energy under certain conditions, but is concerned with underlying and ultimate principles, we turn to it, when we desire to know the things that count. Ah, but what are

the

the things that count? And how can we be sure that Philosophy speaks truly in such matters?

Let us interrogate ourselves, in the first place, on the great, constant cravings of Humanity, the permanent and perpetual needs of self-conscious beings, full of curiosity and able to torture themselves if their wants—intellectual, moral and religious—are unsatisfied. These ultimate problems torture us just in proportion as we are not mere animals. We can carry out our lives on the animal level without much worry. We can eat, drink, amuse ourselves, and so long as we are careful about some elementary laws of hygiene, we can pursue our path with very fair success from the cradle to the grave. But then to human beings come those "obstinate questionings," of which Wordsworth wrote. We are not satisfied with the passive, unimaginative process involved in sleeping and eating and chewing the cud of comfortable repletion. It is necessary for us in practising the Art of Life to ask questions. It is necessary—for the peace and quiet of our minds—to try to know. Many problems crowd into our consciousness and demand some solution. Let us take some

of the most insistent of these, as they affect our consciousness of ourselves and our conception of the world.

(I.) In the first place, what am I? a composite thing obviously, made up out of bodily organs, senses, nerves, feelings, thoughts. Yes, but what am *I*? Where resides my personality? Is that which makes my individuality this body of mine? Or is it something else—my soul or spirit, however defined, the basis of my emotional, imaginative, thinking, self-conscious life? Where resides the ego? In bodily structure or in the conscious mind? I am not happy till I have settled—for myself at all events—this point. Nor can anyone even begin to construct an Art of Life, until he has reached some solution, either provisional, or final, of this problem. If a man be mainly corporeal, then he must live in one way. If he be mainly spiritual, then he must live in another way. You cannot serve God and Mammon.

(II.) No, you cannot serve God at all, unless you also make up your mind as to another kindred difficulty. Descartes, who thought he had located the soul in the pineal gland,—which was only another way of making it

material,—

material,—leant to the conclusion that human beings were automata. Indeed I am not sure that the physical sciences do not practically favour such a conclusion. We are part of the uniform order of Nature, evolved out of lower organisms, with an unbroken chain connecting the highest development of man's self-conscious vitality with the dim restlessness of amœba. We are borne along the torrent of the "élan vital," together with everything else in the Kosmos of things, helpless to resist, driving towards some unknown goal. For all practical purposes, then, we are automata, acting automatically because some obscure force holds the strings which make the puppets dance to tunes which they do not originate but obey. But that is an almost intolerable conception which we can only accept under the severest compulsion. Are we in reality mere slaves, or have we some freedom to stand outside, as it were, of the physical prison-house? And if we are not free to some recognisable extent, how comes it that we talk about our duty and our responsibility and the ethical code which we have imposed on ourselves? The ethical law is "I must because I can." It is not "I will because I cannot help myself."

And if we are not free, what is the good of even thinking about an Art of Life, which involves forethought and selection and self-conscious direction towards a determined end?

(III.) Another matter can be referred to in briefer fashion. I am a self-conscious being with various desires and ambitions and with a definite personality of my own. But I do not stand alone. Around me, whatever may be my station in life, there are a number of other beings, each possessed of a personality, and each a mass of more or less intelligent cupidities. Now, in carrying out my career, I have either to please them or myself. They are in my way, if I am ambitious. I am equally an obstacle to them, if they are ambitious. It is all very well to suggest a compromise, but Charity begins at home. If I do not look after myself, no one else will. But if everyone were thus minded, it is easy to see that the world would become a cock-pit, a wild beasts' den of struggling, tearing, greedy individualities. Perhaps in essence it is something of the kind, but we should be chary of admitting it, because the chances are, with everyone pulling in a different direction, that no one would get anything he wants. In

other

other words, the world would be chaos. But, as an individual, I want to know what is to be my ideal. Selfishness or Altruism? Am I benevolently to think of others, or with narrow prudence to think only of myself? It makes a considerable difference, because until this question is fairly settled, I shall not know what "good" means as distinguished from "evil." Is a good man one who thinks of others, or one who thinks of himself? Both, of course: but we want to know the proper proportion and which is the dominant influence. The contrast is admirably illustrated by the philosophy of Nietzsche and Christianity. For the first, morality means each for himself and the devil take the hindermost. For the second, blessed are the peacemakers, and the humble in heart and those who are kindly and who forgive.

(IV.) And then, whatever one may make of life or whatever may be the distinctive colours it may wear, for all alike comes the inevitable hour when life itself must be surrendered. The solemn ordeal of Death casts its shadows before, and the gloomy portals that we must enter, when our predestined moment strikes, make us shiver with a sense of fruitlessness

and despair. For what valuable fruit can we gather in so brief a span? And if something has been attempted, something done to earn the night's repose, *cui bono?* The day is finished, so far as we are concerned, and the night cometh when no man can work. Such thoughts as these trouble some men more than others, but they must present themselves to every child of Adam—now and again, at all events, when he is low-spirited and things have gone badly with him. What is Death? We passionately crave to know. Is it just the crumbling of the atoms which constitute our individuality into nothingness? Or is it, though the epilogue to our mundane life, the preface to some other life? And who will answer our question for us? Not the Pope, nor the Archbishop of Canterbury, nor the Chief Rabbi! They know no more about the matter than we do. They are, it is true, the professors of their respective creeds, and they can give us the traditional and conventional solutions of the problem. The great hold which Religion has over the average man is precisely this—that it consoles and fortifies the shrinking and terrified human creature, when he feels himself to be moribund. If he can be-

lieve its dogmas, all is well. But many persons cannot believe, either on scientific or philosophical grounds, or because they know something of the history of the Creeds. And if that be the case, then they must face the tremendous dilemma in their own way. Either Death puts an end to conscious life or it does not. In the first case, the constituent elements of our body, which for some few years cohered to form the "self," are dispersed and go back again to the bosom of Nature to be worked up possibly into new shapes, but at all events to the utter destruction of the self. In the second case there is something in us which is untouched by physical decay—which leaves the decaying body to rot in its own manner, while itself survives. Supposing that we assent to the separate existence of the soul, what then? What becomes of it after death? Does its survival mean that our personal consciousness survives, so that we are recognisable individualities—Tom, Dick and Harry in a new sphere? Or does our spirit become merged in a universal spirit, the limited becoming unlimited, the finite infinite, so that Tom, Dick and Harry cease to be distinct and lose themselves in God? You see, it makes

such a difference to us in this world which horn of the dilemma we accept. If our present life be all, if we have just our three-score years and ten to play with, and then nothingness—well, there will be no little justification for the hedonist and the libertine when he says, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But if after this life, there is another one, and possibly a judgment seat, it is a vastly different matter. It behoves us to be careful in view of an unknown future, when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed. Perhaps this haunting dread of the End is the most agonising of all the problems which the Artist of Life has to face. "Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?"

(V.) And yet, I don't know. It may be the most agonising, but it is not the most important of our problems. Much the most momentous and significant question remains when we ask with intense and breathless anxiety how this world is governed. Is it by Chance or Fate or Natural Law, or by God? Suppose that we had to change our country and emigrate to a new and strange one. What is one of the earliest queries we should make?

Clearly

Clearly we should want to know how the new country is governed, whether by an autocrat, or a constitutional king, or by a body of oligarchs, or by a democracy. It would make all the difference to our prospects. If we learnt that we had to pay heavy taxes to an irresponsible monarch and were always subject to his arbitrary will for any new exaction he chose to require of us, we should hesitate before we accepted the conditions. And if we were merchants, it would make a difference to us whether Free Trade or Protection were the habit of the country, just as to the ordinary citizen it makes a difference whether he is allowed to live his own life more or less as he pleases, or whether he is tied, hand and foot, by vexatious restrictions imposed on him by a tyrannous bureaucracy. Or again, if our immigrant learnt that there was no settled government in the new country, but only an anarchical chaos, politely veiled under the titles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, he would probably think twice before he committed himself and his savings to such a welter of indiscipline.

Now we are all of us citizens of the world, the grave contrast between us and the intend-

ing settler being that we have no right of choice and can live nowhere else. But it is certainly as important to us as to any immigrant to ascertain how the world in which we have to live is governed. Perhaps we do not worry about the matter, mainly because we have become used to certain normal and regular conditions, and because, anyway, here we are and here we must remain. So long as the sun rises and sets with unfailing punctuality, so long as spring and summer, autumn and winter follow one another in an unchanging order, so long as we get sufficient opportunities to secure bread and cheese, to make love or to make money, we refuse to trouble our heads about the constitution under which our existence is carried on. Directly, however, there comes a break in our prosperity, or we get ill, or something occurs to change our thoughts from the smiling commonplaces of life to serious realities, then the problem confronts us, with an insistence not to be denied. Besides, from a moral and spiritual point of view—even if we overlook the physical—it matters enormously how the world is governed. "Under which King, Bezonian? Live or Die!" For if the world is all due

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to Chance, to the fortuitous concourse of atoms, we are most assuredly aliens and strangers in a realm with which we have no sympathy and to which we are not akin. It upsets our reason to think that we are wholly subordinate to accident. And if we do not use the term Chance, but speak of Fate as the Supreme Governor, it comes to very much the same thing. For in that case we are slaves, and reasonable people resent conditions of servitude. An impersonal Nature is equally uncomfortable as a ruler. It is like being governed by some wonderful sausage machine, which always keeps time and pace and measure, and turns out its products with unfailing regularity. There is only one other hypothesis. Above Nature there may be a God, who is the Supreme Ruler, the Sovereign of the whole world. The ideal governor, no doubt, is a benevolent despot: unfortunately in our human sphere, despots are not usually benevolent, and benevolent men are not, as a rule, despots. All the better for us if we are in the hands of a divine governor, who may be an autocrat, but is also, *ex hypothesi,* reasonable and merciful. At such a footstool, we can kneel without fear or shame.

V. TWO RIVAL THEORIES

HERE are a series of opposite and contradictory principles concerned with the ultimate constituent elements of a world-theory. I need scarcely say that a good many more might be added to them, if one had the space for adequate discussion. For instance, there is the problem of the existence of Evil—the solution of which cuts very deep into our theories about the world. And, of course, others besides. But I think I have taken fairly representative questions—those I mean, which, starting from the standpoint of the individual, interest and concern him in wider concentric circles till they become synonymous with the nature of the Kosmos. And there is one obvious remark to be made about them. In all of the five, if we take one side of the dilemma, we get a consistent world-theory which is absolutely antithetical to that we arrive at, if we take the other side.

Thus, if we adopt the strictly materialistic position we get a series of propositions of the following kind: (1) The world is what an active, impersonal Nature has made it in accordance with a blind, unintelligent striving onwards to an unknown goal. (2) Death is

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the dissolution of certain fortuitously assembled molecules and atoms, which happen to have cohered to form a given individual. Inasmuch as the individual is nothing but this collection of atoms, together with the forces generated by such collection, he dies for ever when the collection is dispersed. (3) The main business—perhaps the sole business—of the individual is to look after himself. Morality is only a disguised and politic selfishness. Egotism is the only gospel. (4) And I am not to be blamed. Because self-preservation is an instinct, it belongs to the fixed order of things, and I can no more help being selfish than I can help being born in a certain place and possessing hungry appetites. Freedom of the will is a delusion. (5) Lastly, if I ask what is the essential condition, the *sine qua non,* of individuality, it is my body, representing a given concourse of material elements different from other concourses. Soul, not being a material thing, is nothing. It is an image, a metaphor, based on breath (πνεῦμα). The five propositions hold together as a possible world-theory.

But now take the opposite propositions. We will put them down in the same order

as the preceding ones: (i) The world is governed by Reason, Intelligence, Design: or if we like to phrase it so, by God as Sovereign Ruler of the Universal order of things. (ii) So far as I have any share in Reason and Intelligence, I belong to the spiritual order, and have some communion with the Divine Spirit. Therefore, though my body decays, my soul does not. Soul is of the essence of immortal things. It can not die. In what form it survives, is, of course, another question. (iii) My business in the world is to do my duty as a member of a commonwealth, a society of human beings, the very object of whose union is to promote the general welfare. Hence to be selfish is to be a pariah, a rebel. I must not speak so greedily about my rights: I ought to speak of my duties. The beginnings of an intelligent moral code rest on altruism. (iv) If a man is to be moral, he must be a responsible human creature: if he is to be responsible, he must exercise self-control: and if he can exercise self-control he must to this extent, at all events, be free. He cannot be a slave. Of course freedom does not mean license or the indulgence of chance vagaries, but a reasonable power of self-direction. (v)

And

And lastly. The essence of the individual is that he is a spirit. His body changes every seven years. His soul develops but it does not change—a fact to which memory and recollection (passive and active memory) both testify. Looking back over what has been said, we see that these five propositions also make up a consistent world-theory, which can be contrasted with the former. If that be called naturalism, or positivism or materialism, this will be known as spiritualism or idealism.

Now it is no part of my business to be dogmatic. Who could be in dealing with points at once so important and so abstruse? I hope that I have put the issues before my reader with cool neutrality and fairness, although sometimes an expression or an adjective is apt to escape one which reveals partisanship. Let me also say that according to such experience as one has gained of one's fellowmen, it does not seem necessary to make an absolute choice between the two schemes as though they were mutually exclusive. Logically, I think, they are absolutely exclusive: but men are inconsistent creatures, especially in their half-conscious and half-realised beliefs. You will therefore find that certain views out

of the one scheme are held in combination with some out of the other. A man will say, for instance, that he believes in the Divine Government of the world and yet does not believe in the Freedom of the Individual will. That, indeed, is a very common attitude, and a rigorous Calvinism, which upholds in its strict form Predestination (that is to say, a divine determination of each one of our careers from birth onwards) obviously leaves no room for individual liberty of choice. I am bound to say that the scientific arguments against the freedom of the will are exceedingly strong; and ordinary experience of human beings in their common moods and their customary life suggests that at all events they are the unresisting victims of habit, if not of necessity. Nor is it the bad and the worthless who appear to be most bound by their antecedents: it is the good, whose course of conduct can be the more easily foretold. I imagine that it would be a very poor compliment to an upright and loyal citizen, if you said that you could not be certain how he would act in a given contingency. And yet this is what you ought to say, if you carry to its logical conclusions the doctrine of volitional freedom.

But

But this is not the only instance of an amalgamation of opposite points of view. Some of the most clear-headed men I know, who would not for worlds think that an intelligent selfishness was the only morality, or that the Kosmos was the work of Chance or blind natural forces, yet honestly believe that death is the end—absolute and irretrievable—of the individual. To them the scientific argument against immortality appeals with irresistible force. Life depends on a certain arrangement of material elements. When these elements are dispersed and disintegrated, there is an end of life. How can the soul survive when we only know of a soul, apparently indissolubly combined with a body and wholly dependent on corporeal functions?

As a matter of fact, most men are exceedingly disinclined to formulate their ultimate beliefs and therefore allow themselves all kinds of inconsistency. They refuse to examine the ultimate bases of their creed; or, a still more ordinary phenomenon, they profess a lip-service to a creed which has nothing in common with their actual life. Just as a number of respectable and fairly rational men and women will, when they go to church, join

in the Psalms and associate themselves with David's imprecations on his enemies—with all kinds of bloodthirsty expressions, such as "making children fatherless" and "dashing their heads against the stones"—so, too, with similar strangeness, most of us are a little like the grocer, who having asked his shop-assistant whether he had watered the vinegar and sanded the sugar, then bade him come to prayers. In other words, our daily life, commercial or social, has nothing to do with our professed beliefs. The first has a strictly utilitarian basis, probably. The second is supposed to rest on spiritual foundations. Nor must you blame men too severely for this or any other inconsistency. It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to be strictly logical. It seems fantastic, almost ungentlemanly, to carry out abstruse theories to their legitimate conclusion. Ultimate beliefs may be safely left alone, or perhaps taken out of their strong-box for a Sabbath day's airing, being carefully put back to their seclusion for at least six days of the week. We are all like this, remember—and no one has a right to cast a stone at his neighbour. But because there are times, which come to the middle-aged, when the im-

portance of ultimate beliefs grows with the passing of the years and it seems to be an imperative duty no longer to halt between different opinions, but to make up one's mind once and for all—therefore have I tried to write this book. The young, equally with the old, want to clear their minds of cant and face important issues without blenching. It is for them, too, that this book is written—indeed for all who will allow themselves an hour or two's seriousness. Certainly, we will have no arbitrariness or dogmatism in the matter. Those, who know best how uncertain are these metaphysical concepts, how difficult to fix in their precise connotation and their potential range, will be the first to accept modesty and honesty as their becoming attitude. After all, it is better in the presence of the great world-riddles to combine earnestness with modesty than to be indifferent like the agnostic, or ostentatiously resigned like the follower of Comte.

VI. IDEALISM AND MATERIALISM

I DESIRE to eschew technical terms of philosophy, so far as is possible, but as I called

the two contrasted world-theories, Idealism and Materialism, I must make the meaning of the two expressions clear. The second almost explains itself. It is assumed that by means of the ordinary avenues of sense, combined with thought-processes of reasoning and judgment, we get close to the Real. This Real is further discovered to have a material character composed of atoms, molecules, electrons and what not—the real stuff (ὕλη) out of which the world is made. Thus all Nature has a material basis, and we ourselves, though a late product of a slowly evolving Nature, have equally a material basis. The real thing about us as it is about the world, is that body, soul, and spirit, thoughts, emotions, imaginations, fancies, are all, in the last resort, to be analysed into forms, combinations, transformations of molecules and motion, matter and energy.

Idealism is not quite so easy to define clearly. What is the main principle of Idealism? It may be put thus. Idealism uses self-knowledge or the essence of the knowing mind, as the key with which to unlock the secret of the world. What is it that we know best? Ourselves, clearly. What is the most certain thing in the world? The fact of my con-

sciousness of myself—or as Descartes puts it, "Je pense, donc je suis," I exist because I think. Observe—and that is a second step—that we are much more sure of ourselves in consciousness than we are of any external fact. If we ask why, the answer is plain. How do we become aware of the external fact? By means of our sense-perception, or in other words—by means of certain modes of our own consciousness. The object which I observe is of a certain colour, red, green, white: it is hard or soft: it tastes sweet or sour. Every one of these qualities which I give the object are, if we analyse them, merely the affirmations of my perceptive senses. They do not exist in the thing: they exist in me. That—very fragmentarily explained, for I do not want to enter into metaphysical discussion—is the idealistic analysis, which leads up to the startling conclusion that what I call "real" and "external" is the construction of my own mind. Generalise the statement, and we reach the principle that self-knowledge is the key to the understanding of the world. The world, in fact, arises in consciousness. Thought, spirit, mind—these are the ultimate realities; not matter and the atom. And from this it follows that

it is in virtue of our self-conscious thought that we are in tune with the universe, and that it is our spirit which holds converse with God, the Universal Spirit, the Ruler of the Kosmos.

VII. WHY IDEALISM IS TO BE PREFERRED

WELL—how long are we to halt between two opinions? If Jahveh be the God, let us worship him, but if Baal, then let us serve him. In my use of the old Biblical phrase, I have already revealed my own partisanship. For myself, I can hardly understand how any one, who surveys the course of the world's history and the history of religions; who feels the inspiration of Music and Painting and Poetry; who looks into his own breast and observes his own intimate tendencies and the fundamental qualities of his nature; who watches the bond which cements states and keeps human fellowship together; and who knows what it is that makes life sweet and sane and endurable—I say, I cannot understand how anyone who has gone through even a tithe of such discipline, can doubt that the secret heart of the world is Spirit and not Matter, however cunningly manipulated. You can dress up matter in any

fashion

fashion you please, you can so utterly transform it, that it appears capable of arrogating the prerogatives of a living soul, you can even, if you are a materialist, so bewitch and sophisticate your intelligence as to say "Thought is a function of Matter" and believe that such a sentence has some meaning. But at the end, your dressed-up King is still plebeian Matter, and no royal ichor flows in his veins. I am quite aware that rhetoric is not argument, and I therefore lay no stress on such passionate or emotional advocacy as I may be capable of. The fact remains, however, that the great fabric of our Kosmos *looks* as if it were constructed out of spirit-stuff, not out of material atoms: while, if we even dimly comprehend what is involved in the assertion "Ideas govern the World," we shall see in it a fresh argument for Idealism. The triumphant progress of Science is a victory of intelligence and ideas. All the arts appeal to the conscious aptitudes of a thinking self. Music, through the ear, acquires its ultimate meaning and significance in the brain. Poetry, above all, is the structure of a creative imagination, bubbling out of an internal source within a man's self. And Genius? Genius is a fairy, irresponsible, un-

predictable gift and grace of the gods, which, like the wind, cometh when and how it listeth and is a supreme vindication of the autocracy of Spirit. To what can the materialist point? To the enormous value of scientific discovery, no doubt, which made the nineteenth century so marvellous a period in the world's history. Yet the very processes by which his victories have been won are purely mental and especially the use of hypothesis, which is mostly imagination and clever guessing.

Let me assume, at all events, that you and I are enlisted on the side of the idealist, and that we are ready to accept his analysis and his world-theory, leading up to the conclusion that the great secret of the Kosmos is the predominancy of Spirit. And now see what an advantage we have, when having in whatever fashion constructed our Science of Life, we turn to the Art of Life. Here are we, creatures, as we say, of a day, who nevertheless possess intelligence, discover all we can about our environment, and feel the deepest interest in these great structures of the human mind, Art, Science and Religion. We are quite aware that life is a fragile thing, and that we are at the mercy of accidents. Fate may seem

to

to be against us; something in our own nature —perhaps the survival of an animalism belonging to long past ages of our struggle upwards—is, often or perpetually, opposing and checkmating our best impulses: while if we look around us, we are oppressed by the misery, the poverty, the squalor that are all around us. Nevertheless, being intelligent ourselves, we believe in a God of intelligence, and being humanly kind and benevolent, we believe in a God who is divinely kind and benevolent. Or, if we may not go so far as this, and it is a point to which I shall return presently, we believe in an ultimate Power not ourselves, a Universal Spirit, who makes for righteousness, whose action tends that way, and is therefore sympathetic with the highest aims of humanity. God, or the Universal Spirit, is, we dare to affirm, the *presupposition* alike of our knowledge, our morality and the world at large. The presupposition of knowledge, because, as our knowledge grows, it gradually absorbs more and more of that rounded and perfect orb of omniscience, which is God. The presupposition of morality, because the ultimate idea of goodness towards which we dimly strive is only another name

for God. And the presupposition of the world itself, because all evolution and progress being *ex hypothesi* an intelligent process, tends towards a certain end, which we take to be the ultimate purpose of God. I can imagine how the agnostic and the materialist, the one with his indifference and the other with his lofty resignation, scorn what seems to them our sentimental rhapsody. But they must not call us illogical, if from the standpoint of Idealism we accept not only efficient causes (or rather the relation of phenomena to one another) but also final causes. For the great end of all things is something which Intelligence has designed and towards which therefore it patiently works. We only see part of the pattern, doubtless: but at all events, it seems to be a pattern and not a chaotic collection of loose threads. The God, who gives us sunsets, and flowers and the sweet consolations of beauty in colour and form, is the same God who gives us Goodness and Truth. Veritably, he is a trinity, the God of Art, the God of Science, the God of Morality. In this last high analysis, Beauty is Truth and the Good is at once beautiful and true.

VIII. PAIN AND EVIL

AND now let us grapple with those awful shadows, Pain and Death, which make life so treacherous and so vain. I take it that the majority of us are not Stoics, but Epicureans. It is not our mood to wrap ourselves up in a lofty disdain of all the accidents that may befall us: we are not strong enough for that. The real Stoic is a fine creature, but he is cold and austere and not quite human: and his creed is a chilly and deliberate disregard for just those things which are of the very essence of life. The Epicurean of the finer type, such as apparently was Epicurus himself, is a much more human thing, because he recognises that man naturally craves for pleasures and happiness, though he insists that we must discriminate between our pleasures and choose only the most satisfying ones. He does not meet Pain and Death with a direct negative. He does not commit himself to the paradox that to the wise man they do not exist. Alas, they are real enough, as our shrinking nerves testify! He therefore tries to make the best of such sunny satisfaction as life affords and thinks as little as he can of the deep marginal shadows. But we must remember that we are

going to add Idealism to our Epicureanism and that instead of the Epicurean Gods who exist in their own celestial region caring nothing for what goes on in our terrestrial sphere, we insist on having our own conception of a Universal Spirit, who is the God and Father of us all.

The Mystery of Evil is wrapped up with our notion of what God is and can hardly be discussed separately. Meanwhile, so far as Pain is concerned, the one thing that is absolutely certain is that, in some intimate way, it is indissolubly mixed with our growth in knowledge and our growth in morality. We may regret that such is the case; we may imagine an order of things, so cunningly arranged that we could learn without suffering and be good without the temptation of Evil. But that is not our Universe: and what is the good of kicking against the pricks? We have to deal with things as they are and as they will be. Why therefore should we deceive ourselves? Unless it is tried in the fire of suffering, virtue is a poor anæmic thing. Even innocence and chastity are purely negative excellencies. In such cases ignorance, so far from being bliss, is a defect, almost a sin.

IX. DEATH

BUT Death? Ah, that is a different matter. No one can console himself by saying that Death is educative, or that it does us good, or that it adds to our knowledge. It notoriously does none of these things. It seems like a blank wall, which shuts us off from everything which interests us, which puts a period to our usefulness, which flatly negates all that we are here for. And it is no good to shut our eyes, as an ordinary Epicurean might do, or hide our heads in the sand and pretend that the great Hunter does not see his prey. What are we to say, pursued by so remorseless an Enemy?

I remark, in the first place, that a sheer sense of contrast magnifies our apprehensions. Here, in the vivid sunlight, with the red blood bounding along our veins, and the faces of our friends around us and a thousand interests pressing upon our alert attention, it seems an awful thing to die. Gloom instead of radiance, pain instead of health, solitude instead of companionship—could any contrast be more tremendous? But God, or Nature, is good to us. As we gradually approach those shadowy avenues which lead to the grave, we

lose, little by little, our keen consciousness of life. The eyes have grown dim, the pulse is weaker, the almond-tree flourishes, desire fails —because man is going to his last home and soon the mourners will be about the streets. Compare death with what you are now, and the difference is appalling. But not if you compare death with what you will be then. It will then wear much more the face of your nurse, another and greater nurse soothing you to sleep. Ask those who have been near the gateless barrier, and whose faces have been brushed by death's wing. I remember when I nearly died of typhoid, I was very still and I only wanted to be left alone. Whether I turned one way and lived, or turned another way and died, it did not seem to me to make much difference: and when my nurse asked me—and her voice seemed to me to come from an illimitable distance—whether she should wake and call my relations, I shook my head. I did not dread being alone—it is the solitude of death which alarms some persons—I wanted to be alone. There was only just a tiny step to be taken, a thin partition to be pushed through. And it did not seem to matter anyway. Like Hezekiah, the man who is

vaguely conscious that his last hour has come, naturally and inevitably turns his face to the wall. This is what the philosopher meant, when he told us not to fear death because "when we are, death is not, and when death is, we are not." It seems a frigid, abstract sort of thing to say, but it contains a deep truth.

Of course, there are some deaths, full of agony, and we cannot bear to think of them. But they are not many in the total sum, and pain itself is not so dreadful when our vitality is reduced, almost to nothingness. All suffering is relative.

I do not wish to touch on the consolations of Religion, because this essay is not concerned with creeds or theological dogmas. But still I may remark that the Idealist, who not only believes in an Absolute Spirit or Universal Self-Consciousness but envisages it in the form of a God, the ruler of this universe, has a deep source of consolation in the consciousness that he is in Divine hands. He, too, like the Psalmist can say: "Though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy Rod and thy Staff they comfort me." He cannot say it with quite the same unreasoning faith, for

his belief is conditioned by his reason. Yet if this universe is divinely guided to some predestined end, and, how or why we know not, its progress involves the death of the individual—to make way, we will say, for his successor—then he must accept this as part of the Divine plan. When the Kosmos of things was first set going, it began its triumphal march in joy. Then, as Job says, "the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God leaped for joy." Whatever it was which was then conceived and brought to light, it was accompanied by happiness. And shall not the same happiness—the joy of the sons of God—follow it step by step as it slowly evolves, shaping itself to some perfect goal? And the death of the individual—the death of countless generations of individuals—is part of the plan. The great Spirit overlooks the whole progress, and we must be content.

Of course to those who are confident that something is to come after death, some other and better sphere (or perhaps a fresh cycle of existence, if we accept the idea of metamorphosis) the grave loses much of its terror. Socrates, when he was preparing himself to meet his end, said that Death was either a

sleep and therefore the best of sleeps, or else a transference to happy isles where he might be privileged to meet all the heroes of the olden time. Plato believed alike in the Immortality of the Soul and in a series of transmigrations: and indeed if we believe that the soul survives the dissolution of the body, there is no logical reason why it should not have existed in another form before birth.

But I remark that, as far as I am aware, the great moral teachers of the world have been inclined to discourage speculations as to a future world. Socrates said very little on the subject and so too, I think, did Gautama himself. Christ notoriously checked curiosity. "Think ye that those on whom the tower of Siloam fell were sinners more than others? I tell you no, but unless ye repent, ye shall likewise perish." "Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling." Or again, when pressed by inimical controversialists on the subject of Jewish marriage and the necessity of a younger brother wedding his deceased brother's widow, Christ remarked, "Ye err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." For in the great hereafter "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but

are as the angels of heaven." In other words, the conditions of the future world are so different from ours, that it is useless to speculate about them. Christ seems to suggest that our great business is to do our best in the present sphere, and not worry ourselves about the next. Have faith and trust in the power of God.

X. SPIRITUALISM

AND that is why the ordinary so-called "Spiritualism" seems such a foolish thing. Because, I suppose, many people find it so difficult not to speculate about the hereafter, they have tried to evoke spirits and wrest some answer from them. And even when with the aid of mediums and all sorts of thaumaturgic professors, they have evoked the shadowy presences of the departed, the spirits have no answer to give. So many efforts have been made by earnest seekers of the Psychical Society and it has all been so piteously fruitless! If it consoles a man to believe that some of his dead, dear ones have, through the instrumentality of a medium, been permitted to speak to him, who are we to say him nay? Heaven knows we want consolation, when we

watch some beloved face fading from our ken, and wonder how it will be with the departed, and whether he will ever think of us again in all our troubles and our sins. But it is wiser not to dally with so-called spirits. A man loses something of his moral and mental fibre, when he flirts with superstition and allows himself to be cajoled. It is better to try to do one's duty in this world and be content.

To do one's duty! That is no easy task—easier perhaps for the believer in a definite creed, who supposes himself to be acting under the great taskmaster's eye, more difficult for us who acknowledge the supremacy of a great Spirit or Universal Self-Consciousness, but are loth to envisage him or it as a kind of pedagogue. What is it that makes it so hard to let our better self emerge, which seems to be an obstacle to our higher ambition and a definite hindrance to the realisation of good? And, if we recognise that there is this sort of struggle between our real self and something adverse and inimical, how are we to explain it? How, especially, are we to explain it in reference to our idea of God? Of course, there have been many answers in the course of the history of human thought. Ahriman

and Ormuzd, the good spirit and the evil spirit: God and the Devil struggling for victory in the world and disputing with each other the possession of man's soul: the Idea of Good and the resistance of Matter—these are some explanations taken at random. In our modern world, which dislikes the acknowledgment of a fundamental dualism between good and evil elements, the interpretation of our difficulty is made to turn on human evolution. Man has had a long history; he has been striving upwards through many forms; only within a few centuries, relatively speaking, has he emerged, or wrestled himself free, out of his material swaddling-clothes and become veritably a man. Naturally, therefore his past is always dragging him backward and putting chains on his aspiring spirit. The evil of which he complains is the heritage of past ages of slow development: it is the crust and slough of animalism and materialism; the hole of the pit whence he was digged. He was once a monkey and something lower. Now he has attained to man's stature, but his monkeyhood clings to him. Even in his consciousness, there is, as psychology now maintains, an unconscious

substratum,

substratum, the deposit of experience long since gone through, a "subliminal consciousness" as it is called, a consciousness below the threshold, which testifies to the past not only of himself, but of the race to which he belongs.

Whether such an explanation satisfies or no will depend on the predilections of the individual. It is undoubtedly plausible, but it leaves God out of the business and ignores the question of our responsibility. For clearly we are not responsible for the past history of man's evolution and it is no fault of ours that we were once arboreal apes with all the ape-like vices. It is, in fact, if we analyse it, a fatalistic creed. We are born so and so—with a nature and character that has come down to us from bygone generations. How then can we control what we do? Heredity enchains us, evolution makes us slaves. And just as when we were monkeys, we could not help acting as monkeys, so now, though we may have become men, we cannot help still acting frequently as monkeys, through the sheer tyranny of past monkeyhood. It is a charmingly easy fashion of relieving ourselves of all ethical obligation and it agrees admir-

ably with the modern notion that men are puppets or automata. We pat ourselves on the back (though we have no logical right to do so) when we do well: and when we do ill, it is all the fault of heredity or the subliminal consciousness of those monkey ancestors of ours. But what exactly do we mean by "doing well"? And whence have we obtained our conception of "the good" as distinct from "the evil"?

XI. GOD

LET us approach the problem in a different way, and go back to the very roots of the matter. We have acknowledged in our world-theory the supremacy of a Universal Spirit or Divine Self-Consciousness, as the only key to unlock the "riddle of this painful earth." And we do not hesitate to call it God, without necessarily accepting all the implications of Theology. Very well. And now, what is the relation in which God stands to the Universe? How do you and I, as ordinary thoughtful men, conceive of the situation? I will be bound to say, that according to our customary moods—that is to say, without sophisticating ourselves by any philosophical

analysis—

analysis—we suppose that God, after having created the world and given, as it were, the first push to it, then superintends its subsequent working, just as the Captain stands on the bridge and superintends the working of the steamship. In other words, the Divine architect—whether we are going to regard him also as a Providence or not—is distinct from the world and stands outside it, just as the Captain stands outside of, and is distinct from, his ship. We can only use simple human analogies in this connection. Let us do so without any fear of being charged with "anthropomorphism," for the simple reason that whether we like it or not, we have no other way, except a human way, of approaching the problem. We interpret what goes on in the mind of a dog by what goes on in our own minds. And we have no other means of interpreting something infinitely higher than ourselves than by the same human measurement and appreciation. God, then, we assume, from a position outside the Universe, directs and controls the working of the vast machine which he originally called into being.

WELL—that is what, philosophically, is called Dualism, and whether or not it be the simple human way of regarding the matter, it is fiercely combated by those who style themselves Monists. How, they ask, can you recognise such a distinction between God and the Universe? If something stands outside God, as distinct from him, then he is not universal—because there is something else besides God, namely the world. Moreover, the something else is clearly a limitation of his power, an obstacle which he has to control, or which would be an obstacle if in his foreknowledge he did not obviate its resistance. Therefore your God is not omnipotent. He is like the Jahveh of the Hebrews, whose designs are checkmated by the subtlety of Satan. The only theory, they urge, which can be satisfactory to our intelligence is the recognition of a single ultimate principle—Monism, in short. And that carries with it as a consequence, a belief in Pantheism. Pantheism is the acknowledgment that God and the Universe are one and the same—that God is *in* the Universe, not *outside* it, and that the Kosmos as a whole is precisely what we mean by God.

The

The drawback is that though we have satisfied our intellectual demand for a *single* ultimate principle, and thus attained to the kind of metaphysical structure which looks rounded off and complete and self-supporting, we have not satisfied our ordinary conception of individuality. For us, after all, the main thing we want to understand is how we come to be, each with our own personal interests and duties, and how we stand related to the universe of things. Now what is the "principium individuationis" in a Pantheism, such as Spinoza's? It is really very difficult to be sure that there is such a thing. For as soon as I ask what I am, I have to answer that I am a fragment of one form of the Universal Substance—so far as my spirit is concerned—while I am equally a fragment of the other form of the Universal Substance—so far as my body is concerned. And that does not seem to explain the essential characteristic of myself, that I am one separate individual. And, even if we assume that somehow or other in the midst of the great enveloping All, room is found for distinct personalities, how can such creatures have a duty to perform, and a moral responsibility resting on their shoulders?

The fact is, of course, that every system of Monism as such sacrifices the individual for the sake of preserving the logical unity of the whole: it is so anxious to provide us with its single ultimate principle that it tends to destroy all the picturesque and complicated variety of life. We may picture it to ourselves in another way. According to some theories we are received after our mortal existence into a Universal Consciousness: the human spirit is resolved into the Universal Spirit: the finite becomes the infinite. Now let anyone try to imagine in accordance with this view of immortality how you and I are to remain recognisable personalities, how we can meet again the loved ones we have lost, how we can greet them as the human beings we remember and be greeted by them in turn. The thing is obviously impossible. The Universal obliterates the specific, the individual entity, in one dead all-embracing unity. It wipes out, as it were, the features of *a* face, and gives us instead *the* face—the latter being the generic norm or standard of all faces. In a photograph you can superimpose one face upon another, until you get to something vaguely like, but not actually representative of anyone of

the individual faces, of which it is composed. This is the Universal which kills the particular. And in Pantheism, also, the Universal kills the particular. We, you and I are all unreal in such a system. We have not any specific existence apart from the whole to which we belong and in which we are swallowed up. Carried along on the general stream of things, swept into the vortex of an evolving Kosmos, whether we like it or no, whether we submit or whether we resist (but indeed resistance is impossible), what is the good of our pretending to be self-directed, free, responsible agents, when we are only items in an immense Order or Universal scheme, which goes rolling on, whatever we may say to the contrary? It reminds one of that pathetic hymn of Cleanthes: "Lead me O Zeus and you too Fate—and I will follow without delay. Even if, in my wickedness I should refuse, I shall have to follow all the same" (*ἦν δὲ μὴ θέλω, κακος γενόμενος, οὔδεν ἧττον ἕψομαι*).

Now it may suit some listlessly Epicurean natures to feel that inasmuch as all activity is useless, it is on the whole a comfortable theory to believe in Fatalism. But it assuredly does

not suit men and women of a sturdier fibre: nor, if they are religiously minded, does it seem to them at all a plausible supposition that God should have made them thus helpless and yet require at their hands the pursuit of virtue. And what Good is, and, above all, what Evil is, it is very difficult to explain on Monistic principles. Evil has to be defined as negation or as shadows on a sunlit picture—at all events as something unreal. Now the one thing that for the ordinary man is certain about Evil is that it is not negative. Evil is itself essentially positive and real. Go to the man who is trembling under some great temptation, and tell him that the Evil which he both desires and dreads to do is a mere shadow or privation and therefore quite unreal, and listen to his reply. He will probably tell you that Evil is unfortunately so real that he cannot escape from it—indeed that in his present case, it is much more real than the problematical good to which he ought to aspire. When Christ healed his patients, he expelled a devil—so real did Evil seem to him! And in the Lord's prayer, when we petition for deliverance from the Evil or the

Evil One, it would be a strange substitute if we said, "Deliver us from what is negative and therefore unreal!"

XIII. DUALISM

NO—I think, in our reconstruction of human life, we must begin by recognising three realities—stubborn elements in our problem which we shall only ignore at our peril and subsequent discomfiture. In the first place, the individual is real—you, I, Tom, Dick and Harry are real—not phantasms which imagine themselves real. In the second place, God is real. Only by believing in the intimations of our own self-consciousness, we remember, did we rise through our own intelligence to the recognition of a Universal intelligence, to which—partly for convenience—we give the name of God. If therefore the individual is real, so too is the Absolute Spirit of God. Moreover the relations between the two are real relations, involving a definite progress in knowledge and a definite progress in morality. In knowledge the universal gradually reveals itself or unfolds itself, to the individual—that is what advance in knowledge means. And in morality, too, the absolute good gradually re-

veals itself to the aspiring human soul, and so "God fulfils himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world." In the third place, Good and Evil are real conceptions of real things. And if this admission is going to land us into Dualism, we must not be afraid of the bogey of a mere word. Perhaps, whatever the logicians and metaphysicians may say, Dualism is true, and not Monism. Perhaps it is not so absolutely necessary for our intelligence to derive everything from a single principle and to be dissatisfied with any scheme which falls short of this unity. At all events, if analysis, however ruthlessly pursued, leaves us at the last with two principals and not one, what are we to do but resign ourselves to the inevitable?

We shall see better what is involved in these admissions, if we turn to the conception of God. Logically and philosophically considered, God is defined as the totality of Consciousness, Universal Self-Consciousness, Absolute Spirit. That means that he is the exact antithesis of all that we designate as material, spirit and matter being wide as the poles asunder. Morally considered, he is the Ab-

solute Good, or as Plato would term it, the Idea of Good—the exact antithesis of all that we designate as Evil. Theologically considered, he is the All-knowing, the All-powerful, the All-kindly, the All-willing, the All-just. Now it is clear that some of these attributes are not mutually consistent. If God wills everything, then he must also will Evil, and therefore he ceases to be good. Or again, if he knows everything he must know all the inequalities, injustices and miseries of the world, and therefore he ceases to be just. Or once more, if he is all-kindly he cannot also be all-powerful. Despite his active desire to be benevolent, there must be some restriction on his ability, his power: or else there would not be evil in the world. He can not will that we should suffer pain, or else he would not be benevolent. And yet we do suffer pain and injustice and therefore he can not be omnipotent. Either he is omnipotent and therefore there is no such thing as Evil: or else there is such a thing as Evil and therefore he is not all-powerful. We can not shake ourselves free from these puzzling antinomies, so long as we merely repeat the dogmas of a creed. Nor can we accept them as insoluble.

It is as though we should be so hypnotised by the sound of abstract, dignified terms (as I believe some theologians are) that we begin to talk of "the high and noble music" of the Athanasian Creed, without any care or thought as to whether the dogmas make sense or nonsense.

If we turn to the logical or metaphysical definitions, we see at once what the dilemma is. There is an Absolute Spirit on the one hand: and there is Matter, or if we like to say so, the World, on the other hand. The difference between the two conceptions, Spirit and Matter, may be purely formal, not real. It may be a merely logical distinction not corresponding to actuality. If we can accept this, then God may *be* the World and we can adopt the Pantheistic theory and be Monists. But the argument of the past pages is that we can not accept this—because Monism or Pantheism can not explain the existence of individuals, the meaning of moral responsibility and the reality of Evil. Very well, then we must take the other horn of the dilemma. We must say Spirit is one thing, Matter is another: God is one thing, the World is another: Good is one thing, Evil is another.

another. And on his theory (which of course is Dualism) it will follow that there is some element in things which offers opposition and is an obstinate obstacle to the purposes and schemes which most accord with our intelligence and our highest nature. Spirit can not quite overcome the opposition of Matter: Good struggles not too successfully against Evil. God's purposes are qualified by the resistance of the World, the Flesh and the Devil. It is naturally the last proposition, which seems the most startling to the ordinary thinker, especially if he be religiously-minded. And yet it is plenarily confirmed by Hebraic doctrine, which constantly represented Satan as having the power to negate the Divine Will: and, I think also, that it is not contradicted by Christianity. Think of the Lord's prayer. "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." If we pray for such a consummation, it clearly is not yet realised. We ask that God's purposes may be fulfilled, as though the work were by no means complete. And what about such expressions as "fellow-workers with God"? The assumption is that there is a big work yet to be done, in which we too must put

our shoulders to the wheel. All this can only be explained if we understand that the Divine Spirit is opposed by something which is not Divine: and inasmuch as we too are conscious in our own experience that our "best-laid schemes gang aft agley," owing to the ugly insurrection of our lower nature, we can sympathise and help in the divine work. Aristotle put the point rather differently in accordance with his theory of εἶδος and μορφη, form and matter. Nature, he thought, wanted to achieve her perfect work in the most ideal way. But she had not the power always. Therefore it is an imperfect world, because ἡ φύσις βούλεται μὲν, ἀλλ' οὐ δύναται —Nature wants, but cannot. The root-conception is the same though Aristotle talked of Nature, while we are talking of God. God wishes, but his will is negated by something other than himself. And do not let us forget what all this implies in reference to the conception of what God is. We can allow that he is all-benevolent: we can even say that he is omniscient, though with some necessary limitations. But there is one thing we can not affirm. We cannot say that he is omnipotent. Over against Good stands Evil. Over

against God stands the opposition of Matter.

Does this sound irreverent doctrine? But observe that it is only another way of saying that the world progresses, that it is, and has been all along, slowly developing. In the upward climb of humanity, there has throughout been a struggle between the lower which drags back and the higher which pulls upward. This is the opposition between spirit and matter in another form. "The spirit warreth against the flesh, and the flesh warreth against the spirit, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." And, though such a theory may make us profoundly melancholy, when we observe how irritatingly slow the movement is, how often it is retarded and set back, remember for our consolation, that it is progress. *E pur si muove.* God is gradually fulfilling himself. It is not a hopeless struggle. It is not even a drawn battle. It is the dawning of victory. The confines of Evil are getting more restricted. The sphere of Good is expanding.

But shall I be told that the doctrine that God is not omnipotent is not conducive to human morality? Is it not? On the contrary, I should have thought that it supplies

the strongest of all grounds for doing right. So long as you believe that God not only wills to help you, but that he is all-powerful and therefore can do with you what he likes, it seems to me that the ordinary not too energetic individual will be inclined to fold his hands and very contentedly leave everything to God. But if you have to help God and become intimately aware that when you do wrong, you are, so far as lies in your power, negating his purposes, while by doing good you are, according to your capacities, actually forwarding his purposes and helping to their fulfilment—then you have every reason to bestir yourself. To be moral is to do something, to struggle upward to the light, to accomplish something helpful, to raise humanity to higher levels. Can you have a better motive for all this than that you are one with God, seeing eye to eye with him, working towards the same great End? And that he actually stands in need of your help? Thus we can satisfy both sides of that apparently paradoxical Scripture: "Work out *your own* salvation . . . for it is God who worketh in you." Or, as Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate, says:

The world is unto God a work of art,
Of which the unaccomplished heavenly plan
Is hid in life within the creature's heart,
And for perfection looketh unto man.

THE END

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